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Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 5008

March 9, 2020

Honorable members of the Energy and Technology Committee, thank you for your consideration of our testimony related to HB 5008 An act concerning the establishment of high-performance green building standards for voluntary adoption by municipalities.

In order to meet the state's goals of reducing emissions by 45% by 2030, the built environment needs to be significantly transformed. Onsite building emissions account for 31% of Connecticut's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions¹ and the built environment nationally consumes approximately 71% of electrical power generation², making the built environment responsible for a total of 47% of Connecticut's GHG emissions. Implementing a stretch code gives municipalities an important tool to transform their building stock to meet the challenge of the climate crisis and reduce air pollution increasing the health of their population including the most vulnerable communities.

We applaud the intention of HB 5008 to implement a stretch code that addresses more than just energy, acknowledging a more comprehensive sense of what makes a successful built environment, because the massive investment and transformation of the building stock needs to also address equity, ecological restoration, and human health and wellbeing. It is important to learn the lessons of urban renewal which shortsightedly left behind vulnerable communities to advance a culture of single occupant vehicles and the migration to the suburbs, and from which cities are still trying to heal.

We recommend that DEEP consult with the Connecticut Codes and Standards Committee, and establish a task force of architects, other building professionals, and representatives from municipalities that are enthusiastic to adopt the stretch code. Developing a strategy for implementation and enforcement is important to make the stretch code as effective as possible. We suggest that the legislation be revised to include the establishment of a committee or board be similar to the Codes and Standards Committee for evaluating updates and reviewing appeal requests.

We also recommend that there be alternate paths to compliance with the stretch code such as achieving other green building certifications such as LEED, CORE, Living Building Challenge, Passive House, or Energy Star. These alternate compliance paths have the potential to transfer the burden of state and municipal enforcement officers onto third party consultants and auditors.

In terms of overall costs to building owners, in Massachusetts, the first state to enact a stretch code in 2009, a 2016 Residential Cash Flow Analysis showed that homeowners saw a positive cash flow from day one purchasing a stretch code home vs. a base code compliant home, and studies of specific commercial buildings show that savings in energy costs far exceed the greater initial construction costs.³ In addition, affordable multifamily buildings are already the market leaders in using energy efficient air source heat pumps, so in our opinion arguments that the stretch code would adversely affect affordable housing construction are not supported by the evidence. We encourage DEEP to work with utilities, the Connecticut Green Bank, and others to develop and raise awareness of incentives, rebates, and financing options that will make the stretch code achievable for everyone.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our support and recommendations for the implementation of a strong and effective stretch code that can position Connecticut as a market leader and increase the quality of life in Connecticut.

Sincerely,

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¹ 2018 GC3 Report, Building a Low Carbon Future for Connecticut: Achieving a 45% Reduction by 2030

² US Energy Information Administration, 2019 Electricity End Use Data.

³ Mass.gov: Building Energy Code